

What is claimed is:

1. A method for managing a hospitality organization having geographically distributed business entities providing one or more respective facilities, wherein arrangements with respect to use of the facilities provided by the business entities are made via one or more of a plurality of channels, the method comprising the steps of:
  - (a) maintaining a centralized inventory system for the business entities and the respective facilities associated with the business entities;
  - (b) receiving via at least one of the plurality of channels a request for a pricing proposal associated with at least one of the facilities of at least one of the business entities;
  - (c) in response to the request for the pricing proposal associated with the at least one facility, generating a quote based on data residing in the centralized inventory system; and
  - (d) transmitting the quote, via at least one of the plurality of channels, in response to the request for the pricing proposal.
2. The method according to claim 1, wherein the quote is generated without using data held only by the business entity.
3. The method according to claim 1, wherein the request for a quote is received directly from a customer.
4. The method according to claim 1, wherein the hospitality organization includes sales staff members, the request for a quote is received from a sales staff member and the quote is transmitted to the sales staff member.

5. The method according to claim 1, wherein the business entity employs respective staff, the request for a quote relates to a facility of the business entity and is received from the business entity staff, and the quote is transmitted to the business entity staff.
6. The method according to claim 1, wherein the quote is generated in real time.
7. The method according to claim 1, wherein the quote is generated using real-time data residing in the centralized inventory system.
8. The method according to claim 6, wherein the quote is generated using real-time data residing in the centralized inventory system.
9. The method according to claim 1, wherein the channel via which the request for quote is received by the centralized inventory system comprises the channel via which the quote, once generated, is transmitted in response to the request.
10. The method according to claim 1, further comprising the steps of receiving an acceptance of the quote and provisionally allocating the at least one facility to which the quote relates.
11. The method according to claim 1, further comprising the step of receiving payment for the provisionally allocated at least one facility.
12. The method according to claim 11, further comprising the step of fully allocating the at least one facility.

13. The method according to claim 10, further comprising the step of updating the centralized inventory system to reflect the provisionally allocated at least one facility.

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14. The method according to claim 13, wherein the centralized inventory system is updated in real time.

15. The method according to claim 11, further comprising the step of updating  
10 the centralized inventory system to reflect the receipt of payment for the provisionally allocated at least one facility.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein the centralized inventory system is updated in real time.

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17. The method according to claim 12, further comprising the step of updating the centralized inventory system to reflect the full allocation of the at least one facility.

20 18. The method according to claim 17, wherein the centralized inventory system is updated in real time.

19. The method according to claim 1, wherein at least one of the plurality of channels comprises a global distribution system.

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20. The method according to claim 1, wherein at least one of the plurality of channels comprises a property management system associated each individual one of the distributed global facilities.

5 21. The method according to claim 1, wherein at least one of the plurality of channels comprises a call reservation service.

22. The method according to claim 1, wherein the geographically distributed business entities comprise properties of a hotel chain.

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23. The method according to claim 1, wherein at least one of the plurality of channels comprises a designated sales force, and wherein the designated sales force is associated with the hospitality organization.

15 24. The method according to claim 1, wherein at least one of the plurality of channels comprises an Internet site associated with the hospitality organization.

25. The method according to claim 1, wherein at least one of the plurality of channels comprises a third party Internet site for processing the request.

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26. The method according to claim 1, wherein at least one of the plurality of channels comprises a customized extranet provided by the hospitality organization for a customer of the hospitality organization.

25 27. The method according to claim 1, wherein at least one of the plurality of channels comprises a dynamically-added channel.

28. The method according to claim 1, wherein the generated quote is independent of the channel via which the request for the quote is received.

29. A hospitality management system for providing quotes associated with facilities of geographically distributed business entities of a hospitality organization, the hospitality management system comprising:

a centralized inventory system comprising a data storage system for storage and retrieval of data associated with booking the facilities of any of the business entities; and

a central interface in communication with the centralized inventory system and the business entities and accessible by customer entities for booking at least one of the facilities of at least one of the business entities,

the centralized inventory system adapted for generating quotes based on data stored in the data storage system and associated with the facilities of the business entities.

30. The hospitality management system according to claim 29, wherein the customer entity comprises a customer.

31. The hospitality management system according to claim 29, wherein the customer entity comprises a sales entity of the hospitality organization.

32. The hospitality management system according to claim 29, wherein the data stored in and retrieved from the data storage system of the centralized inventory system comprises real-time data.

33. The hospitality management system according to claim 29, wherein the quotes generated by the centralized inventory system comprise real-time quotes.

5 34. The hospitality management system according to claim 29, wherein the centralized inventory system is further adapted for booking a facility of a business entity in response to acceptance of a quote by a customer entity.

10 35. The hospitality management system according to claim 29, wherein the central interface is adapted for receiving requests for quotes from a plurality of channels.

15 36. The hospitality management system according to claim 29, wherein at least a subset of the business entities communicate electronically with the hospitality management system according to procedures that differ from those of business entities not in that subset and wherein the central interface is adapted for communicating with the business entities regardless of the differing procedures.

20 37. The hospitality management system according to claim 36, wherein the procedures comprise data formats.

25 38. The hospitality management system according to claim 29, further comprising a revenue management system in communication with the centralized inventory system, the revenue management system adapted for generating quotes for facilities of the business entities according to a plurality of

sources of data having potential bearing on the economic value of the facilities for which the quote is requested and under conditions imposed by the quote.

40. The hospitality management system according to claim 38, wherein the  
5 plurality of sources of data comprise real-time data from the centralized inventory system.

41. The hospitality management system according to claim 29, wherein the  
10 centralized inventory system comprises a processing system for controlling storage and retrieval of the data in the data storage system.

42. The hospitality management system according to claim 41, wherein the processing system generates the price quote based on retrieved data.

15 43. The hospitality management system according to claim 42, wherein the retrieved data comprises real-time data and the price quote is generated in real-time based on the retrieved real-time data.

44. The hospitality management system according to claim 29, wherein the data  
20 associated with booking of facilities of any of the business entities, stored in the data storage system, comprises real-time data.

45. The hospitality management system according to claim 29, wherein the central interface comprises a publish/subscribe system.

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46. The hospitality management system according to claim 29, further comprising a business intelligence system in communication with the centralized inventory management system for accessing and processing the data associated with booking of the facilities of any of the business entities to generate customer-specific service preferences.

47. The hospitality management system according to claim 46, wherein the customer specific service preferences comprise at least one selected from the group consisting of room preferences and preferred amenities.

48. A method for operating a central inventory system for a hospitality organization having a plurality of geographically distributed business entities, the method comprising the steps of:

(a) maintaining a database associated with the central inventory system, the database comprising centrally-generated price and availability data relating to facilities of the plurality of business entities;

(b) receiving a booking request for at least one facility of the plurality of business entities;

(c) based on the booking request, retrieving from the database data relating to the facility;

(d) processing the retrieved data to generate a quote for the facility;

(e) transmitting the quote in response to the booking request;

(f) receiving a signal reflecting acceptance of the quote;

and

(g) updating the database based on receipt of the signal reflecting acceptance of the quote.



49. The method for operating a central inventory system according to claim 48, wherein the database is maintained on a real-time basis.

50. The method for operating a central inventory system according to claim 48,  
5 wherein the retrieved data relating to the facility comprises price setting data.

51. The method for operating a central inventory system according to claim 50, wherein the facility is of a given type and has given characteristics, the price setting data is derived on the basis of at least one selected from the group  
10 consisting of: market analysis relating to the facility type and characteristics; strategy considerations relating to the facility type and characteristics; demand forecasting for facilities of the given type and characteristics; optimization methods for pricing of facilities of the given type; and monitoring of profitability of previously booked facilities of the given type.

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52. A centralized system for managing pricing and booking of facilities of geographically distributed business entities of a hospitality organization, the centralized system comprising:

(a) a centralized inventory system for maintaining a single repository of data  
20 associated with pricing and booking of the facilities;

(b) an application server in communication with the centralized inventory system over a network, the application server being accessible over the network by the centralized inventory system for booking the facility; and

(c) a central interface in communication with the centralized inventory  
25 system, the application server and at least one external system, for supporting communications between the centralized inventory system, the application server, and the at least one external system.

53. The centralized system according to claim 52, wherein the data associated with pricing and booking of the facilities comprises real-time data.

54. The centralized system according to claim 52, wherein the external system  
5 comprises a system operated by a customer entity.

55. The centralized system according to claim 52, wherein the external system comprises a system operated by one of the plurality of business entities of the hospitality organization.

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56. The centralized system according to claim 52, wherein the at least one external system comprises a property management system associated with a business entity of the hospitality organization.

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57. The centralized system according to claim 52, wherein the at least one external system comprises a sales support system.

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58. The centralized system according to claim 52, wherein the at least one external system comprises a revenue management system for optimizing revenues based on centralized inventory system data.

59. The centralized system according to claim 52, wherein the at least one external system comprises a global distribution system (GDS).

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60. The method according to claim 52, wherein the facilities comprise properties of a hotel chain.

61. A method for managing one of a plurality of business entities of a hospitality organization, the method comprising:

- 5 (a) receiving over a network, from an inventory system centralized with respect to the plurality of business entities, data associated with booking of facilities of the business entity; and
- (b) assigning resources of the business entity based on the booking data received from the centralized system.

10 62. The method according to claim 61, further comprising the step of accessing, over the network from the centralized inventory system, pricing data associated with the booking of facilities.

63. The method according to claim 61, further comprising the step of refraining from determining a price for the facilities of the business entity.

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64. The method according to claim 61, wherein the hospitality business entity comprises a hotel.

20 65. The method according to claim 61, wherein the hospitality business entity comprises a cruise ship.

66. The method according to claim 62, wherein the pricing data received from the centralized inventory system are updated on a continuing basis.

25 67. The method according to claim 66, wherein the pricing data reflects pricing that is optimized using a revenue management system.